

The Tongue of the Learned

ISAIAH CHAPTER FIFTY

"Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away?. For your transgressions is your mother put away."

SO God begins His appeal to Israel recorded in Isa. 50. We are reminded of Hosea's beautiful living allegory of Israel as the unfaithful wife who abandoned her husband and children. It is a sad picture that the Scriptures present to us of God's chosen people. In the main, it is 3½ thousand years of wickedness, bondage, and estrangement from God. Why? Why must such terrible sadness be?

Because of folly, willfulness, shortsightedness of seeking, and being immersed in the passing animal present instead of the eternal spiritual future. We each have just a few brief years of opportunity. We are here but for a moment—a moment so short and precarious that nothing really matters about it but one thing—laying hold on eternal life. Anything that does not contribute to this is precious, irreplaceable time forever wasted, forever lost. Most of us live as though we take our eternal salvation for granted, with plenty of time for passing, perishing things. What folly! What tragedy!

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

"Always abounding in the work of the Lord."

"If the righteous shall scarcely be saved, where shall the wicked and the ungodly appear?"

Do we really BELIEVE these warnings? Do we really believe God—or are we just like blind, stupid, heedless Israel? Do we really believe God when He says the righteous shall scarcely be saved, and that it is only by always abounding in the work of the Lord that any shall attain to the Kingdom? How do we possibly think that we have time for a host of other things?

VERSE 2: *"Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer?"*

Why has it always been thus? Why is it that most who take on the Name of Christ proceed thereafter to *"neglect so great salvation?"* Why did Paul have to say—

"I have no man likeminded . ALL seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's"?

We each have 24 hours a day, 168 hours a week. How much of it is spent in *"always abounding in the work of the Lord?"* Set it side by side: time spent for ourselves, time spent for God's work. Add your own up for yourself. Is it a record worth turning in to the Master? Whom do we think we are deceiving?

"Wherefore, when I came, was there no man?"

VERSE 2: *" . . Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Have I no power to deliver?"*

Is our lack of service and dedication because we don't really believe God can do what He promises? Do we have to spend so much time grubbing for present things because we do not believe He will or can take care of us?

"Having food and raiment, be therewith content."

"Give us this day our daily bread."

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God."

VERSE 2: *"... Behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea: I make the rivers a wilderness."*

God has given ample evidence of His power and His moment-to-moment control of all things. What more evidence do we need, or could He give?

VERSE 3: *"I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering."*

From the natural ordinances of day and night, to the obliteration and overthrow of the mightiest political heavens, God manifests His power and control continually before our eyes.

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"Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away?"

Consider the long and dreadful history of Israel—their degradation, their constant living in fear and insecurity, their frequent massacres, their being driven like cattle from country to country. All these things are terrible lessons written in blood and fire, to try to teach us wisdom, and realization, and spiritual awareness, and total, urgent, exclusive dedication to the one thing that is needful. But how many are really moved to tremble at these things and to walk in wisdom?

VERSE 4: *"The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned."*

The word for "learned" here is actually "disciple"—the faithful follower, the one who is taught by the master. The picture here changes abruptly from condemnation of the unfaithful wife Israel to a beautiful portrayal of Christ, her one true, faithful Seed unto God: a portrayal of wisdom, of beauty, and strength of character, and faithfulness.

If we only had the simple common sense to put verses 4 to 9 in actual practice in our lives on a robust, fulltime basis, most or all of our problems would disappear, and we would be well on the way to the Kingdom of God. If we do NOT have the sense to put these things in constant, daily practice in all that we do, we are just completely wasting our time and lives.

In their perfection of beauty, these verses describe Christ—

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

But they are far more than that. They are the required pattern for all who would be Christ's at his coming.

VERSE 4: *"The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."*

Can we say honestly this? Do we want to be able to say it? Is this the way we want to dedicate our lives; or do we prefer to seek our own pleasure and profit? How did Christ acquire the tongue of the learned so he could give joy and life to the weary? By suffering and by study—

"He learned obedience by the things that he suffered."

"O how love I Thy Law! It is my study all the day ... Through Thy precepts I get understanding."

So it must be with all who would be Christ's—

"Thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation."

How many of us can say we know the Holy Scriptures? How is it we can talk a blue streak all day about passing, present things with no memory problems, but when someone starts asking

very simple, elementary Bible questions, the answer so often is a blank stare and a weak smile, and—"Oh, I have such a terrible memory?"

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart (and your memory) be also."

So much knowledge about so many things that do not matter! So little knowledge about the one thing that does matter!

VERSE 4: *".. He wakeneth morning by morning; He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned (as the disciple—the eager learner)."*

Morning by morning, day by day, precept upon precept—steady, consistent plodding study and application. The rage today among those who esteem themselves wise is for what they quaintly call "higher education"—so they can earn a few more grubby dollars and enjoy a few more snobbish luxuries and pleasures. How empty and how sad! And the end they are so diligently laboring toward is the same old cold dark endless grave as everyone else.

But what about the TRUE "higher learning," the TRUE "education"—the one that can really do us some lasting and eternal good? Their poor little animal minds cannot comprehend this—

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ... they are foolishness unto him."

God says, to Israel and to us (Ps. 32:9)—

"Be ye not as the horse and the mule, that have no understanding,"

—set your sights on a destiny a little better than that of the dumb beasts that perish.

VERSE 5: *"The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious."*

The flesh, being naturally foolish, naturally rebels against wisdom. The key to salvation is to discern and overcome IN OURSELVES the natural rebelliousness of the flesh against the Word of God. We can see it SO clearly in others.

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other."

VERSE 5: *"... I was not rebellious, neither turned away back."*

In a similar passage in Psalms it is put this way (40:6-8)—

"Mine ears hath Thou opened ... I delight to do Thy will O my God. Yea, Thy law is within my heart"

God does not just require obedience. He requires an intense desire and JOY to obey. He requires a constant "searching the Scriptures" to know and fulfill His will more fully and more perfectly—

"The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up."

The only true Christadelphian—bride of Christ—is the one whose whole life and interest revolves wholly and exclusively around God, who is always about the Father's business. There are no half-measures. If we have the Truth in truth, this is what it will inevitably do to us. It will transform us. It will eat us up. It will grow and grow stronger and stronger in our lives. It will be a fire in our bones. We have read in the past few days—

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot."

"So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Lukewarm—unpalatable, sickening, disgusting to God. Half and half—half in the

Truth and half in the world.

There are many commands of God's love and wisdom to discipline and subdue and mortify the flesh. The flesh will of course fight them. We have two courses to follow—to either recognize the evil motions of the flesh within us, and pray like Paul—

"Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

Or we can stupidly side with the flesh against the commands, and squirm and twist and maneuver to obscure and evade them.

We can either be zealously on the safe side of a command—anxious to manifest our love by over-obedience if possible. Or we can raise every objection and stretch every apparent loophole or supposed obscurity of the command to justify the willful way of the flesh. One way is life—the other is death.

VERSE 6: *"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair."*

Why? Because it is God's will and wisdom that we overcome the flesh and put it to death by the mind of the Spirit. This was Christ's great victory: *"I have overcome."*

"Blessed is he that overcometh."

How much have we overcome the flesh? How much do we live, think, and act by the mind of the Spirit? The fruits of the Spirit are these—

"Love, joy, peace . . ."

Is this the picture that our lives and characters give to the world, and to our brethren and sisters?—

"Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control."

Is this how an impartial observer would describe us? Would he marvel at our unearthly, patient, long-suffering Godliness under pressure and provocation? If not, why do we think we shall get eternal life? God insists on RESULTS, on fruit—this "fruit of the Spirit." Of the tree that bears no fruit He says—

"Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?"

We must be visibly radiating spirituality, or we are living a lie—we have made no contact with divinity as we claim to have done. If a light bulb does not radiate brilliance, it has either made no contact with the source of power, or it is just a dead bulb. In either case, it is worthless as a light in a dark place.

If we really ARE brethren and sisters of Christ, we SHALL radiate in the world, and stand out like a live bulb amid a host of dead ones. We shall be utterly and strikingly and unmistakably DIFFERENT from all natural, animal mankind.

"If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged..."

—judged at the last day and condemned.

VERSE 6: *"I hid not my face from shame and spitting."*

This is the faithful victory of Christ, and this is why he now sits in glory at the Father's right hand. We are well aware of the patience and gentleness and self-control with which he went through every form of humiliation and suffering. This is our great example. This is our great inspiration. None of us is ever asked to submit to a fraction of what he suffered in order to manifest his faith and love and obedience to the Father. And what little we are put through,

in our training and development for the Kingdom, we are assured will never be beyond our power to sustain. Not, of course, our OWN power. If we rely on that, we are lost.

The Spirit of Christ in Isaiah 50 continues—

VERSE 7: *"For the Lord will help me, THEREFORE shall I not be confounded."*

That is the point. We have got to be tried so we can learn to draw upon and experience this help—so that our faith can be developed and strengthened by being put to test and to use.

VERSE 7: *"... Therefore have I set my face like a flint."*

Let us keep that expression ever before us. Here is the only true wisdom and character and maturity and stability—

"I HAVE SET MY FACE LIKE A FLINT."

Not stubbornness: not willfulness—that's the flesh; but a steadfast, enlightened, unshakable courage and determination to stick close to God and to follow the path of obedient, CHEERFUL holiness regardless of any adversity. Let us be like Christ who *"set his face to go to Jerusalem."*

VERSE 8: *"He is NEAR that justifieth me; who will contend with me?"*

Here is the secret of strength. He IS near! Of Moses it is said (Heb. 11:27) that he *"endured as seeing Him Who is invisible."* He endured everything—the meekest of all men—because he could SEE GOD. God was a tremendous, overwhelming, ever-present reality to him. God said to Jacob—

"I am WITH THEE ... in all places whither thou goest."

David said, and here again it is the spirit of Christ speaking—

"I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (Psa. 16:8).

This is the psalm where he says—

"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell."

Jesus is here telling us the secret of his endurance and victory over the world—

"HE IS NEAR THAT JUSTIFIETH ME."

If we were actually in the direct presence of God, we would have no difficulty maintaining faith and holiness, and keeping our mind on divine things.

We ARE in the direct presence of God—ALWAYS. It is all a matter of perception and discernment. This is how all the faithful of old were able to endure—

"He endured as seeing Him Who is invisible."

Jesus said—

"I am not alone; because the Father is with me."

And when he left his disciples, he gave us a beautiful promise that is all too little remembered and laid hold on (John 14:23)—

"If any man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

"We"—God and Christ—will *"come unto him and make our abode with him."* Have we sought the fulfillment of this marvelous promise? Has it happened to us?

VERSE 9: *"Behold, the Lord God will help me: who is he that will condemn me?"*

Again, the primary reference is to Christ, and his God-strengthened perfection—

*"Which of you convinceth me of sin?"
"I do always those things that please the Father."*

But Paul, writing to the Romans applies this very quotation directly to Christ's brethren, at the end of ch. 8. He is developing and climaxing that glorious theme that—
"ALL things work together for good to them that love God." (v. 28)

If we are the children of God, nothing can possibly happen to us that is not for ultimate and eternal good. What a wonderful and comforting assurance! What is there in the world that can begin to offer a minute fraction of that guarantee?

Why then do people depend on broken cisterns when the waters of life flow so freely? We do not need to worry about the reason of things. All we need to be concerned about is that we react faithfully and spiritually to ANYTHING that comes upon us, knowing that all evil will at last pass away, if we hold fast. Paul continues in v.31—

"If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Our only concern in this life should be to make sure God IS for us. And that is done by careful, reverent, loving, thankful obedience—constant effort to get a deeper knowledge of His Word, and a closer likeness to the character of His Son.

We hear so much in the world about consolidating all our debts into one simple bank loan—about consolidating all types of insurance into one simple overall policy. But the world has nothing like this simple solution that covers every problem and every need: this Bank to end all banks, this Insurance to end all insurances, this comprehensive, immutable guarantee to eclipse all rickety human schemes of "cradle-to-grave" security blankets against fear—

"IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?"

And here Paul brings in the verse from the chapter in Isaiah we are considering (Rom. 8:33-34)—

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?"

We deal with no one but God. We are accountable to no one but God. We are concerned with no one's judgment but God's. Paul said to the Corinthians—

"With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of any man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord."

Truly we must conform to many things to do with men, but only because God says so—not because of any inherent importance in the things or men themselves. Of all human, worldly, present things and people, Jesus continues in Isa 50—

VERSE 9: *"... Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment. The moth shall eat them up."*

Here is the only true test of value and of importance. What will last, and what will pass away? Let us consciously separate all things clearly into these two categories—the things that last and the things that pass—and then give all our attention to the things that are eternal. Ask yourself of everything: Will it last? Is it related to eternity? If it is not, forget it. Life is too short. It isn't worth our precious time.

Paul builds this theme to a glorious climax in the final verses of Romans 8. Let us conclude with them, and try to keep them ever before our minds in all that we do, in all our waking hours (35-39)—

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

"As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter .."

Stop and think deeply about all these terrible trials the faithful of old have cheerfully endured, and held firm and obedient through—

"Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come.

"Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

—G.V.Growcott, The Berean Christadelphian, August, 1973